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ANTIDOTE

TO

West-Indian Sketches,

DRAWN

FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

No. I.

CONDITION

OF

THE SLAVES IN THE BRITISH COLONIES,

FROM

PINCKARD'S NOTES ON THE WEST INDIES.

LONDON:

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ANTIDOTE

TO

West Indian Sketches, &c.

A SMALL pamphlet, entitled "West Indian Sketches," has lately been disseminated, with wonderful assiduity, in order to *prejudice* the public, and particularly the members of both Houses of Parliament, against the whole Society of the West Indies. This is only part of a system that has been long pursued by a few individuals in this country; who, in defiance of truth, in contradiction to authentic information, and with unparalleled effrontery, have dared to accuse the colonies of every crime their heated imaginations could conjure up. Let it not be supposed that the West India body are insensible to the calumnies which have been invented against their character and honour, or to the danger which threatens their lives and property. But the injury is not theirs exclusively; the permanent welfare of the empire demands, that in a question in which the very existence of the colonies is at stake, these offenders against all honorable consistency and candor should be convicted of their falsehood at the justice seat of public opinion. The following pages therefore, are written to warn the public against sacrificing the best interests of England—as they are advised to do by a few individuals, who, under the mask of humanity, are aiming at the total ruin of our valuable colonies—to unveil the delusion which fanaticism and prejudice would throw upon all colonial subjects—and to point out the paths which are visibly preparing for the rapid march of murder, anarchy, and desolation in our West India possessions. In doing this we shall trust to "authentic docu-

ments" rather than to long argument, in order to shew the spirit of wilful falsehood and calumny, which actuates the editor of the *West Indian Sketches*: and we shall begin by referring to those very extracts from Dr. Pinckard's notes on the West Indies, which he has so partially collated, and so disingenuously misrepresented in his first number.

In the year 1796, Dr. Pinckard accompanied a large expedition sent by this country against the Dutch colonies. It was completely successful, and Dr. Pinckard accordingly lived on shore with the army. He gives an account of the state of the *Dutch Society* in Demarara, and amongst other things, relates what was told him of an expedition fitted out by the Dutch government, the year before the colony was in our possession, against the Bush negroes, who are, for the most part, runaway slaves, living in the woods and subsisting on plunder. After much difficulty, some of the Bush negroes were taken and punished by the *Dutch*, in a manner which could not be justified even by the crimes and murders of those depredators.

Having described the shocking punishment that was inflicted upon them, the editor says, "the object of the present paper is to give one of those *graphic representations* of West India manners and feelings, in respect to the slave population, which Dr. Pinckard's work has furnished us.

"Well may humanity shudder at such a recital. But if the transaction be too horrid even to be told, what must it have been to be witnessed, and still more to be felt?

And is it in the uncontroled power of *persons capable of perpetrating such atrocities*, that the British Parliament and nation will be content to leave the destinies of so many of their fellow subjects? We must no longer squeamishly turn aside our view from these spectacles of horror. This nation can no longer decline the duty of examining them, aye, and of remedying them too."

Only mark with what insidious and wilful obliquity the "Sketch" applies this scene, (*which was acted twenty years ago, in a DUTCH colony, under DUTCH laws, and government, and by persons totally unacquainted with our language*), to the present existing state of society and feelings in our ENGLISH colonies!

So that the sins of the Dutch in Demarara are to be visited on the heads of Englishmen, who are eminently humane, both individually and as a nation! As well might all the horrors of the French revolution be brought up in judgment against the present generation in England, Russia, and the other States of Europe, as the cruelties of the Dutch planters of 1796, be a subject of reproach to the English of 1816. But it is of little moment to these calumniators how far their assertions are founded in truth. They circulate the poison, conscious that it is poison;—they scatter abroad the flames, sensible that those must produce destruction;—but equally sensible that in the ruin, *they* can suffer but remotely. They know that in the disguise, in which their principles are spread abroad, before they are discovered, they must have taken considerable effect, and a repetition of the same measures, they calculate, will accomplish the object at last.

We beg our readers to pause for a moment on this part of the subject, and to judge for themselves how far the African Reports and the West Indian Sketches, which go

hand in hand together, are entitled to credit, when they can so garble and misrepresent the facts which they pretend to quote.

"Surely the rumors which ascribe these Sketches to Mr. Stephen, are highly injurious to that gentleman—and cannot possibly be true;" a master in the Court of Chancery, whose first duty is to be just to all men—one who has filled the situation of a member of the British Parliament, where honor, integrity, and consistency of principle, are the only path to greatness; and ought therefore to actuate his conduct, cannot have descended to become the editor of a scurrilous pamphlet, which conceals real information, misrepresents facts, and violates the sanctity of truth.

But leaving this question, which is not very important to the general subject, let us further enquire into the justice of identifying the feelings and acts of Dutchmen, with those of our own countrymen.

In the first place, hear what Mr. Brougham says of the Dutch in his *Colonial Policy*, vol. 1, page 75.

"The Dutch, on the other hand, who grovel after every kind of profit, whose spirit for gain is tempered by no dignity of character, and prompted by the competition of large capitals, are of all nations in the West Indies, the most inhuman masters, and the most pliable, in worming themselves into the various habits of gainful speculation;" and again, Sect. 3, page 361. "The most unfortunate circumstance in the colonial policy of the Dutch, has always been their bad treatment of the slaves."

No, it is *not* to persons "capable of committing such atrocities, that the British Parliament and nation, are leaving the destinies of thousands;" it is *not* to Dutch proprietors, but to English humanity, that our slaves are entrusted.

But that the contrast between the Dutch and English, in their

treatment of the negroes may be made still more evident, and the disingenuous attempt to judge of the one by the other more clearly unmasked; we shall conclude this number with one or two extracts from "authentic sources," which we presume even the editor of the sketches will not be bold enough to dispute. They are from the notes of Dr. Pinckard, whom the sketch acknowledges to be so "respectable a witness, and so far removed from every suspicion of partiality or party feeling." Having made a tour round the island of Barbadoes, he concludes in these words. "To bring into one point the sum of gratification afforded by this delightful excursion, would be a work of difficulty.—You will form some idea of it from the loose details I have marked. It has offered us an abundant opportunity of seeing the whole face of the island—of viewing many of the different plantations—of observing the produce, and method of cultivation—of witnessing the manners and customs of the inhabitants—and of noticing the labors and habits of life of the slaves; whom we have seen in the fields—in their huts—in the sugar works—about the houses—at their moments of rest and retirement—and amidst all their various occupations and modes of employment."

Does this look as if a system "pre-eminent in cruelty and injustice," prevailed in our colonies;—when Dr. Pinckard "found it difficult to describe the sum of gratification which his delightful excursion afforded him?"

But let us follow him into details, and our humane readers will be almost as much gratified as the author was, "in being able to remark, after much and careful observation, that the planters in general" (even twenty years ago, observe) "are humane and merciful, and do not exact immoderate toil; with them the slaves have a certain round of duty, which cannot be regarded as excessive or

severe; being such as may be performed without any hurtful exertion."

And thus again he describes the happy condition of the negroes.

"At the estate I now speak of, a circular piece of ground was appropriated as the negro yard; but instead of the slaves being left to construct their own habitations, sixteen very neat and uniform cabins were erected of wood, and well roofed with shingles. Placed in eight divisions, they form a hollow octagon, a free opening being left for the breeze at one end of each hut. In the centre of the octagon is built a common kitchen, which serves for all the sixteen families. The huts are neat, and the whole premises wear an air of order, and of cleanliness, not common to the abode of slaves. We contemplated this spot with much satisfaction, and were gratified in observing the high degree of attention, which was here given to the comfort and accommodation of the negroes, who had little cause to lament their removal from the wild woods of an opposite shore, and could scarcely desire to change their present lot for the high rated freedom of European paupers. This happy negro yard forms as it were, a complete village of sixteen families, all of whom may assemble each evening, after the labor of the day, to join the merry dance, or to smoke and sing together, free from every care. They have no thought how to provide for their infants, or their aged parents; nor have they to seek either food, habitation, or apparel. To each family is allotted a separate, and to all a common home; the necessary food and clothing are issued to them; and they know none of the anxious vexations or difficulties of the world. No fearful concern, nor harassing incumbrance can arise to them on account of their offspring, who, like themselves, are furnished with all that is needful; and those who have most children, find themselves most valued and esteemed.

"In sickness, medical attendance is provided for them, and whatever is required, is administered without any trouble on their own behalf. *Thus are they guarded at every avenue, against the approach of want and solicitude.* Six days labor is demanded from them in the week; but the sabbath is given them as a day of rest and relaxation; and from the total absence of care, it is usually spent in unbounded mirth and festivity."

This is one of the many delightful pictures, which Dr. Pinckard has drawn of the happy state of the negroes in the British colonies; but all of which, let it be remarked! the editor of the West Indian Sketches, *has carefully suppressed.* Our readers would dwell with pleasure, as we have done, on many similar passages from the same work: but we must content ourselves, for the present, with one more, which affords the strongest possible evidence of the humane treatment of the slaves, under English masters.—This extract describes, we may say, the perfect happiness which the negroes enjoyed on the estate of Mr. Dougan, an English gentleman, who was settled in Demarara, and who in spite of the system which prevailed around him, among the Dutch plantations, still supported that national character, for humanity and gentleness, which distinguishes an Englishman, but which the African Institution, and the editor of the Sketches are so anxious to vilify.

"We were conducted after dinner across the canal to visit the estate, and happy home of Mr. Dougan, a neighbour whom Mr. Osborn had invited to meet us. Here we found a rich sugar plantation, bordered with coffee and fruits. I cannot express how much we were interested and gratified with all we saw at this cheerful abode of Mr. Dougan.

"The plantation is laid out with

much taste, and having every advantage of culture, it exhibits, in high perfection, all the luxuriance of an opulent tropical estate. Utility, comfort, and convenience, are here most happily combined.

A private canal leads through the middle of the grounds, and serves for ornament and pleasure, as well as for bringing home the copious harvests of coffee and sugar.

"At its sides are smooth walks of grass; and between these and the sugar canes are borders, planted with all the choice tropical fruits, rendering a promenade upon the water or its banks, most fragrant and inviting, and offering to the eye and the palate, all the variety of oranges, shaddocks, forbidden fruit, citrons, limes, lemons, cherries, custard apples, cashew apples, avagata pears, grenadelles, water lemons, mangoes, and pines. The other walks which traverse the plantation, are also cool and sweet smelling avenues of fruit trees. *But, however, great the richness, beauty, and fragrance of the estate, its canals and its walks, still, I am sensible that I shall more firmly secure your attachment to it, by mentioning the simple fact, that, to the slaves it affords, a happy home!* I know not whether, upon any occasion since my departure from England, I have experienced such heartfelt pleasure, as in witnessing the *high degree of comfort and happiness enjoyed by the slaves of the Profit estate.* Mr. Dougan not only grants them many little indulgences, and studies to make them happy, *but he fosters them with a father's care,* whilst they, sensible of his tenderness towards them, look to *their revered master, as a kind and affectionate parent;* and, with undivided unsophisticated attachment, cheerfully devote to him their labor and their lives. Not satisfied with bestowing upon his negroes mere food and raiment, Mr. Dougan establishes for them a kind of right. He assures to them certain property, en-

deavours to excite feelings of emulation among them, and to inspire them with a spirit of neatness and order, not commonly known among blacks; and I rejoice to add, that, the effects of his friendly attention towards them, are strongly manifested in their persons, their dwellings, and their general demeanour. Perhaps it were not too much to say, that, the negro yard at 'Profit,' forms one of the happiest villages within the wide circle of the globe. The slaves of Mr. Dougan are not only fed, clothed, and tenderly watched in sickness, without any personal thought, or concern, but each has his appropriate spot of ground, and his cottage, in which he feels a right as sacred as if secured to him by all the seals and parchments of the Lord High Chancellor of England, and his court.

"Happy and contented the slave of 'Profit,' sees all his wants supplied; *never having been in a state of freedom, he has no desire for it; not having known liberty, he feels not the privation of it*; nor is it within the powers of his mind either to conceive or comprehend the sense we attach to the term. *Were freedom offered to him he would refuse to accept it*, and would only view it as a state fraught with certain difficulties, and vexations, but offering no commensurate good. 'Who gib me for gyughaam,* massa' he asks, 'if me free who gib me clothes? who send me a doctor when me sick?'

"The cottages and little gardens of the negroes, exhibited a degree of neatness and plenty *which may be envied by free-born Britons not of the poorest class. The huts of Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, and many even of England itself, bear no comparison with these.* In impulsive delight, I ran into several of them, surprising the slaves with an unexpected visit. They mostly consist of a comfortable sit-

ting room, and a clean well furnished bed chamber. In one I observed a high bedstead, according to the present European fashion with deep mattresses, all nicely made up, and covered with a clean white counterpane; the bed posts, drawers, and chairs, bearing the polish of well rubbed mahogany. I felt a desire to pillow my head in this hut for the night, it not having fallen to my lot, since I left England, to repose on so inviting a couch. *The value of the whole was tenfold augmented by the contented slaves being able to say, 'all this we feel to be our own.'*"

We could have wished to add a few extracts from Bryan Edward's History, and other authentic documents to the same effect, but the limits of our present number will not permit us to do so. Let this one fact, however, be particularly attended to; it is a highly important one, and on which humanity and benevolence may dwell with pleasure, that these "graphic representations," *were made twenty years ago! long before the ameliorating acts were passed—long before the abolition of the slave trade,* which has, even by the admission of Mr. Wilberforce, and Mr. Stephen, opened a new æra in the colonial system, and introduced great and radical improvements in the condition of the slaves. Enough has now been said to enable our readers to judge of the *fairness and candor* of the West Indian Sketch, No. 1, and of the real merits of a cause which requires so much falsehood and misrepresentation to support it. We shall follow this gentleman through the remainder of his sinuous windings, and not permit him to write down common sense among mankind. In no instance has the arrogance of popular ambition, (as exemplified in the few individuals who conduct the affairs, draw up the reports, and expend the resources of the African Institution) shewn itself more conspi-

* Clothing.

cuous than in matters connected with our colonial establishment; in none has the prejudice of party been more conspicuous; in none have the efforts of fanaticism been attended with more dangerous results. Like all other inovators, whenever these men have a private theory, which they want to prove and establish, they invariably en-

deavour to misrepresent and defame those whom they intend to injure and oppress.

This is part of the system which has been played off upon mankind for the last thirty years by every would-be legislator, and the consequences of which have shaken the moral and political world to their deepest foundations.

